
THE
Incomprehensibleness
OF
Imputed Righteousness,
BY
HUMAN REASON, &c.

BOOKS Published by
the same AUTHOR,
and Sold by Tho. Cockerill.

1. **A** *Sermon at the Funeral of
the late Reverend Divine,
Mr. Edward West.*

2. *A Discourse of Regeneration,
Faith, and Repentance.*

3. *A Discourse of Christian
Religion, in Sundry Points.*

THE
Incomprehensibleness
OF
Imputed Righteousness,
FOR
JUSTIFICATION,
BY
HUMANE REASON,
Till Enlightned by the
SPIRIT of GOD.

Preached in Two SERMONS at the
Merchants-Lecture in Broadstreet.

By THOMAS COLE, Minister of
the Gospel in London.

And Published at the Instance of many
who heard Them.

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I

TO THE
Christian READER.

TIS a dangerous thing to stumble in Sion, by taking offence at the Mystery of our Redemption by Christ, because we cannot comprehend it by our own Reason: We are commanded to believe it, without consulting flesh and blood about it, but humbly waiting for that anointing from the Holy One, that teaches us of all things, and is truth, and no lie, 1 Joh. 2. 20, 27. Such blindness is hapned to us since the Fall, that we cannot discern the deep things of God, 'till we are spiritually enlightned; yet how many are there, in this disputing Age, who leaning too much to their own

To the Christian Reader.

Understanding, decry all Supernatural Illumination, as mere Enthusiasm, counting Faith it self a blind irrational thing, a bare act of the Will, to which the Understanding contributes nothing, as if Believers had no real knowledge, or inward evidence of the things they believe? Therefore to stop the mouths of Gainsayers, who discover their deplorable Ignorance of the Mystery of Faith by their frequent Mutterings, artificial Reasonings, and Sophistical Cavills against it; I shall plainly declare what I believe to be true in this Case, viz. That Supernatural Illumination which I affirm as absolutely necessary to a saving knowledge of God in Christ, is a divine Light let down from Heaven into the Soul, by which the mysterious Truths of the Gospel are made manifest to the eye of our Understanding; as by the light of the Sun, things bodily, are made manifest

To the Christian Reader.

manifest to the eye of our Body (so says Paul Baines on the Ephesians) This Supernatural Light, is called the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in the knowledge of Christ, Eph. 1. 17, 18. given to the Saints to instruct them in all Gospel Mysteries: We may know this spiritual Illumination, to be a true heavenly Light, because it agrees in all things with the Word of God, the same Spirit of God shining in our hearts, that shines in the Word: Should any pretend by a supposed inward Light, to be wise above what is written, and to know what is not revealed in the Scripture, this were Enthusiasm indeed; therefore to the Law, and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them, Isa. 8. 20. We must not believe every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God,

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because many false prophets are gone out into the world: hereby we know the Spirit of God, every one who confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God, 1 John 4. 1, 2. They who thus confess Christ, i. e. do from their hearts own and acknowledge both the Person and Doctrine of Christ to be Divine, being inwardly perswaded of the Truth of the Gospel, and brought under the power of it, not by the wisdom of man, or by the strength of human reason, but by the inward demonstration of the Spirit, enlightning the mind, and leaving it under the evidence of things not seen, nor understood by humane reason, but plainly discerned by this higher light of Faith; can such a Faith be the effect of blindness? Can such a Faith be Enthusiasm? A Faith grounded upon the Word of God,
and

To the Christian Reader.

and acting from the highest Wisdom, the surest Knowledge, and most undeceivable light that man can walk by; if this be a blind belief, then there is nothing reasonable in the whole world; if this be a delusion, where are we? What can we trust in, if not in that which we so know, and are upon infallible grounds perswaded is truth, and no lye? That which renders Believers suspected by carnal men, is because they cannot communicate that light to the hearts of others, by which they themselves do see. 'Tis true, all have not Faith; and 'tis as true, that some have Faith; pray, whence should such a Persuasion come? How should such a Faith be wrought in any? — It must come either from our selves, from the Devil, or from God.

From our selves it cannot come; because Gospel-Truths are above our Reason, contrary to our Lusts, and

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to all the Inclinations of corrupt nature in fallen man, who cannot by his own power dispose himself to believe the Gospel.

From the Devil it cannot be, as any delusion of his ; we call not that a delusion which is above man's reason, but that which is quite beside the Word of God, or contrary to it ; and no man in his right wits can suppose the Devil either able or willing to instruct men in the Saving Knowledge of Gospel-Truths, which are as contrary to him, as they are to a natural man ; 'tis his interest to suppress them, and he doth his utmost to blind the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine unto them, 2 Cor. 4. 4. Is not the whole Bible from one end to the other, written against the Devil, representing him as an adversary, a hater, and destroyer of
man-

To the Christian Reader.

mankind, laying open his devices and stratagems against us; exhorting us to resist him, to trample him under our feet, to fight against him where-ever we meet him in any temptation; and can we think that Satan is so divided against himself, as to promote the knowledge of that among men, which is so much to his disadvantage? — Whence I infer, If Faith be not of our selves, nor from the Devil, it must be from God, and God owns it to be his work, his Operation, his Gift; therefore let men have a care they don't blaspheme this work of the Holy-Ghost in the hearts of the Saints, setting up their own natural reason in the room and place of supernatural Illumination, without which the Mysteries of the Gospel can never be rightly understood.

Chri-

To the Christian Reader.

Christian Reader, *Having detained thee thus long from the ensuing Discourse, I recommend both It and Thee to the Blessing of God.*

T. C.

T H E

(1)

T H E

Incomprehensibleness

O F

Imputed Righteousness, &c.

Rom. IX. 32, 33,

For they stumbled at that stumbling stone ; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone, and rock of offence : and whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed.

TH E Apostle speaks at large in this Chapter of the Rejection of the Jews, and the Calling of the Gentiles : In the close of the Chapter he shews why so few Jews were converted

verted by the Gospel, to whom
 it was first Preached, and how
 the *Gentiles* came to be called.
 The *Jews* took offence at the Go-
 spel, could not tell what to make
 of the Righteousness of Faith,
 they were all for the Righteous-
 ness of Works ; but God rejects
 both them and their Works, and
 calls the *Gentiles*, who lived in
 Profaneness and Idolatry ; they
 followed not after Righteousness
 of one sort or other ; they knew
 neither Law nor Gospel ; did no-
 thing by way of preparation to
 further their calling ; but God,
 of his mere good pleasure, sends
 the Gospel among them, and
 makes the Preaching of it an
 effectual means of their Con-
 version to Faith in Christ. Christ
 in his Doctrine of Justification
 by Faith, and not by Works,
 was a Stumbling stone to the
Jews,

Jews, as he is to many now-a-days upon the very same account; 'tis what is foretold in Scripture, and what we must expect: *This Child is set for the fall of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against*, Luke 2. 34. So 1 Pet. 2. 7, 8. 1 Cor. 1. 23. The Apostles Preaching this Doctrine, were a favour of Death to many that heard them, and perished under their Ministry by Unbelief; so now, some will take offence at this Doctrine; but be it a favour of Life or Death, we must Preach it.

I shall now shew you from this Text, whence it is, that the Doctrine of Justification by Faith in Christ, through the Imputation of his Righteousness, is such a stumbling stone, and rock of offence to many.

The

The main reason, I conceive, is this, *viz.* Because the way of a Sinner's Salvation by Faith in Christ, is a Mystery far above the reach of man's understanding; no wonder then, that so many boggle at it, count it foolishness, and set themselves to oppose it.

I shall couch what I have to say, under these Three General Heads; *viz.*

1. That the Mysteries of Faith are not comprehensible by reason; the way of a Sinner's Salvation by Faith in Christ, is above a natural man's understanding. This some count Enthusiasm, and cannot bear it, but truth is truth, and must be Preached, whether men will bear it or no.

2. Why hath God laid the way of a sinner's Salvation so high,

high, that no humane understanding can reach it?

3. Though the way of a sinner's Salvation by Christ be above the capacity of a natural man to reach and take in, yet God can give us a true discerning of it. Of these in order.

The first General Head ; viz.

1. That the way of a sinner's Salvation by Christ is above man's understanding: Therefore called the *Wisdom of God in a mystery ; hidden wisdom ;* 1 Cor. 2. 7. Eph. 3. 9. 10. And though this secret of the Lord be now outwardly revealed in the letter of the Word, yet 'tis understood by none, but such as are spiritually enlightned, *Mat. 16, 17. Col. 1. 26, 27. To some it is given to know these mysteries, to others not,*
Mat.

Mat. 13. 11. Mat. 11. 25. 1 Cor. 2. 9, 10. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, Psal. 25. 14. They are under a special anointing, 1 John 2. 27. But for others, they understand not what God is doing in the Gospel; 'tis so great a Mystery, that the Angels admire it; seen of Angels, 1 Tim. 3. 16. They never saw such a sight before; they now desire to look into these things, 1 Pet. 1. 12. are wonderfully taken with this rare method of man's Salvation; and do observe with great delight, how this design of Grace is carried on in the Church, Eph. 3. 10.

The Second General Head; viz.

2. Why hath God laid the way of a sinner's Salvation so high, that no human understanding can reach it?

There

There are Three Reasons of
this, viz.

1. Because nothing that falls under man's understanding could save him.

2. Because nothing doth tend more to the Glory of God's rich Grace, than to fetch the Mystery of man's Salvation out of the depths of Infinite Wisdom.

3. Because nothing keeps man in a closer dependance upon God, than this. Of these in order.

The *First* Reason why God hath laid it so high; viz.

Because nothing that falls under man's understanding, could save him; The case of fallen man was so desperate, that nothing less than Infinite Wisdom could find out a way to save him; either man must eternally perish,
or

or God must put forth himself to the utmost, and go beyond the reason of man to find out a way to save him.

There are four ways of Salvation, that a human understanding prompts us to, some to one, and some to another, but all in vain, we are grossly mistaken in every one of them.

1. Some think to be saved by the Covenant of Works, do rely simply upon that, in a direct opposition to the Covenant of Grace. The *Jews* contended with Christ and his Apostles about this. *Paul* speaks of such, in his Epistle to the *Romans*. There is that Legal spirit in fallen man, that he still inclines to the Law of Works, he foolishly thinks to be saved by that Law which hath already condemned him: It argues

gues great Infatuation in Fallen Man, that he should still desire to be under the Law, which hath already concluded him under Wrath : and yet he hopes for Mercy from that Law, that never knew what it was to shew mercy : Because it was once the way of Salvation for man in innocency, therefore he thinks there may be some hope still ; Alas ! this is like the cry of a condemned Man, upon whom Sentence of Death is already passed, his Cry signifies nothing, he must away to Execution.

2. If Works alone won't justify, man will try what the Works of the Law, and the Grace of the Gospel put together will do ; he joins Christ and the Law, hopes that way to save himself, partly by Grace, and partly by Works ; so did the *Galatians*,

latians, and so do some now-a-days, mingling the two Covenants strangely together, that way may be made for their good Works to help forward their Justification. — *But if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing*, Gal. 5. 2. *If it be of works, 'tis no more grace*, Rom. 11. 6. It must be either all Works, or all Grace; there is no mingling them in point of Justification; we cannot be under both Covenants at once. *We are justified freely by his grace* (says Paul), Rom. 3. 24. We should eye nothing in our selves, but only the free Grace of God in our Justification.

3. If they cannot be justified by the Works of the Law, nor by joining the Works of the Law and Christ together, then they will see what may be done by joining the Works of the Gospel
and

and Christ together ; their own inherent Evangelical Righteousness, and Christ's Imputed Righteousness, must go hand in hand in the business of Justification. There are a sort of *Latitudinarians* who seek to widen the straight gate of Faith, and have almost quite pulled it off the hinges, to make room for their own Evangelical Righteousness, to join with Faith in helping forward our Justification ; what course they take to contrive this, I will tell you (not in my own words, to avoid offence, but) in the very words of a late Eminent Divine, now with God, *viz.* Doctor Owen, who, in his Book, entitled, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ* ; speaking there of the Conditionality of the Covenant, and the
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ill use is made of it, pag. 144. expresses himself in these very words. *viz.* After they have given the specious name of a Condition, and a *Causa sine quâ non* unto Faith, they immediately take all other Graces, and Works of Obedience into the same state with it, and the same use in Justification; and after this seeming Gold hath been cast for a while into the fire of Disputation, there comes out the Calf of a personal Inherent Righteousness, whereby men are justified before God, *vertute fœderis Evangelici*; for as for the Righteousness of Christ to be imputed to us, it is gone into Heaven, and they know not what is become of it. — So far the Doctor. This is a true Account of that new Scheme of Divinity that is so much contended for.

Is it not sufficient to say, That God hath called us to Faith and Repentance in order to Salvation; hath appointed faith, including a serious purpose of turning unto God, as absolutely necessary unto Life, according to the Order of the Covenant of Grace? Let us not trouble our heads, whether Faith be a Condition or no, but earnestly beg of God to give us Faith, to bring our hearts to an humble reliance upon Christ for all that is promised in the New Covenant. It is easily proved, That whatever is promised to believing, is absolutely promised; nay, therefore it is of Faith, that it may be of Grace; God promises no more in the New Covenant, than what he intends freely to give; though he gives one thing first in order to another, yet he freely gives all: To say they don't mean by

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Condition, any Motive, or procuring Cause inclining God to give us Life, is, in effect, to say they mean nothing by it; and therefore since it is a word of so dubious a signification, liable to misconstruction, apt to lead us into a conceit of some Self-righteousness as required unto our Justification, the safest way is to lay that word aside altogether, contenting our selves with Scripture-Terms and Expressions, with sound wholesome words that offend no body's ears.

4. Since neither of the three ways above-mentioned do take, some, wearied with these Disputes, (and I must tell you, rational Disputes about things superrational, will sooner perplex the minds of men, than satisfy them); I say, some, finding no security in the forementioned ways

ways of Justification, that the Reason of Man suggests to him, they cast them all off; and knowing no better, they fly to the general Love and Goodness of God towards his Creature Man, think to come in for a share of that to relieve them in their extremity; and now they think they have hit it, are in a right way of Salvation, having cast themselves upon the general Goodness and Mercy of God. — I grant *God is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil,* Luke 6. 35. his Benignity, or the riches of his Goodness, should much affect us, *Rom. 2. 4.* There is such a thing as *χρηστότης*, and *φιλανθρωπία* in God, i. e. Kindness, Love or Pity towards man. *Tit. 3. 4.* *Φιλανθρωπία*, signifies a proper peculiar love in God to Mankind, more than all the Works of his Hands; yet this

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Love

Love to man is but a general Love, and must not be mistaken for special Grace ; 'tis the *Sun that rises on the evil, and on the good ; the Rain that falls on the just, and on the unjust, Mat. 5. 45.* It doth not argue any special interest thou hast in God more than others ; you cannot from thence infer, that you shall be saved, unless all men be saved ; for that Love you lay claim to, belongs to all men as well as you. Yet Sinners, to keep off all Terrors of Conscience as well as they can, will sooth themselves up with hopes from God's general Kindness and Love to Man ; God is merciful and gracious, and they doubt not but all will go well with them at last, though no satisfaction be made for their Sins ; they don't think of that, but look upon God as if he were all Mercy,

cy, they quite forget his Justice; when that comes into remembrance, then presently they sink again, they see their Plea will not hold; and die at last, either under a judicial hardness, or in horrible tormenting Despair. These are the false ways of Salvation, which for a time Sinners may fancy to themselves; but there being nothing of true saving Faith in all this, they are at last miserably disappointed, and die in their Sins, which will be sure to sink them into Hell.

Since man is nonplust, can't reach it, is out in all his thoughts about the right way of a Sinner's Salvation; let us hear what God says. *He that believeth, shall be saved, Mark 16. 16. Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life, John 3.*

16. 'Tis well for us that *God's thoughts are above ours*, Isa. 55. 9. That what is impossible with Man, is possible with God; when we have done thinking and contriving how to save our selves, let us in a holy despair of our selves, refer the matter to God, whose Understanding is infinite, he can find out a way for our escape, when we can find none; while we are searching for Reasons why God should save us, we shall have a thousand Reasons rise up in our minds why God should not save us; there is nothing more rational for a convinced Sinner, to whom Christ is not yet revealed, than utter Despair; the Law leads to it; and (in that case) not to despair, does argue the greatest ignorance, or highest contempt of the Law imaginable: should Fallen
Man,

Man, (without the Light of the Gospel directing him to Christ) set himself to find out a way for his deliverance, the Law of God would rise up against him, and contradict every thought and imagination of his heart, and bid him let that alone for ever, because it is out of his power, as hath been shewed: nothing that falls under Man's understanding can save him. This is the first reason of the second general Head, *viz.* Why God hath laid the way of a Sinner's Salvation so high, *&c. viz.* because nothing that falls under man's understanding can save him.

*The Second Reason why God hath
laid it so high, viz.*

Because nothing does tend more to the Exaltation and glory of God's rich Grace, than to fetch the mystery of man's Salvation out of the depths of Infinite Wisdom, that it might be the more admired, and more highly prized by us ; such an unexpected discovery was very astonishing, no Tidings more welcome than what the Gospel brings, *Rom. 10. 15. Wherein God shews the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ, Eph. 2. 7.* Not according to our Works (as men are apt to think) but according to his own purpose and grace, *2 Tim. 1. 9.* Man cannot say when he hears the Gospel, that he thought before-hand, that
God

God would take this way ; no, he is amazed at it, astonished at it ; what manner of love is this ? Here is a new thing created in the Earth ; *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, Prov. 25. 2.* God never advised with Angels, or Men, about the way of a Sinner's Salvation, but from Eternity contrived it in his own breast. *Who hath been his Counsellor ? Rom. 11. 34.* This secret of the Lord is now revealed unto us in the Gospel : *O how great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.*

The Third Reason why God hath laid it so high, &c. viz.

Because nothing keeps man in a closer dependance upon God, than to see the way of his Eter-

nal Salvation wrapped up in
 such a Myſtery, that none but
 God can reveal unto him.
 Since this great undertaking of
 God to ſave Sinners, is a bu-
 ſineſs of that nature, of that
 high concernment to us, and
 alſo quite beyond our ſkill,
 and above our knowledge to
 conceive a right of; how
 ſhould we humbly wait upon
 God for further light, that he
 would open the eyes of our
 Underſtanding, &c. as the A-
 poſtle prays, *Eph. i. 18. To*
whom ſhould we go? thou haſt
the words of eternal life, Joh. 6.
68. q. d. None can teach us
 the way of Life, but Thou a-
 lone; O lead us in it, and ſuf-
 fer us not to depart out of it.
 God hath laid the way of a
 Sinner's Salvation ſo high in
Chriſt Jeſus, that none would
 ever

ever come to him, if the Father did not draw them, *Joh. 14. 6.* The *Jews*, those Builders of old, they set at naught the Chief Corner-stone, Jesus Christ, built upon other Foundations, till at last the House fell upon their heads: How positive is *Peter* about the only way of Salvation by Christ, *Acts 4. 12.* He saw that naturally men went the wrong way, knocked at the wrong Door, did not enquire for the right and only Saviour of Sinners, no other Name under Heaven, &c. — So much for the Second General Head, viz. Why God hath laid the way of a Sinner's Salvation so high, that no Humane Understanding can reach it.

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3. *The Third General Head, viz.*

Though the way of a Sinners Salvation by Christ be above the Capacity of a natural Man to reach, and take in; yet God can give us a true discerning of it, and full satisfaction ~~about~~ about it; inclining our hearts readily to comply with it, and acquiesce in it; and this discerning God gives the Saints by his Spirit, not in the Light of Humane Reason, but in the Light of a Divine Faith, grounded upon the Word of God: Faith sees things as they are in God; *in lumine veritatis prima*, in the Light of the first Verity, which is God himself; all Gospel-truths are copied out from that Divine Original, and revealed to us in
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the Scriptures : so much truth as we have in us, so much of the Image of God we have upon us, and no more : an enlightened Mind ascends upwards, by that which is revealed ; to God himself, the first Exemplar of all truth, and sees sufficient grounds for our faith and hope in him ; God lets things into the Soul at another Door than Reason does, which admits nothing but what first passes thorow our Senses ; Faith having to do with things Supernatural, consults not with Flesh and Blood about them, but takes them in by a higher Light, God shining in our hearts, and giving us that evidence of things not seen nor apprehended by the Light of Humane Reason.

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It may here be queried; Since the way of a Sinner's Salvation by faith in Christ is so mysterious, so much above the reach of a mere Humane Understanding, cannot be discerned but in the light of Faith, and that Faith being not of our selves, but the Gift of God;

The Query is, —Whether Man, without offering violence to the Principles of his Nature, as a Reasonable Creature, be capable of such a Faith, that lifts him up above his Reason, and carries him out to those things which a Humane Understanding conceives not? This is the Quere which I am to say something in answer to.

First, God compels none to believe; yet he makes things so clear.

clear to his Saints, that they cannot but believe. Though God gives Faith, *Eph.* 2. 8. yet he forces it upon none; Faith is voluntary: A Mind spiritually enlightned, sees sufficient grounds of faith in Christ himself, and therefore out of choice and judgment relies upon him only, rejecting all other confidences as vain.

Secondly, Faith is either Humane or Divine; We are naturally capable of both, but with this difference: We may bring our selves to a Humane Faith, but not to a Divine Faith; *i. e.* we may bring our selves to a Humane Faith, about things we see, hear and understand; Reason and common Charity doth this: there is no man but believes something; I am not now speaking

speaking of a natural Faculty of believing in a humane way; all men as men, have this; —but I am speaking of a Divine Faith, proper only to Christians; a faith in God and Christ about those things that transcend our Reason. I say, no man can bring himself to such a Faith; he hath no natural Faculty or Principle in him, that leads him to such a Faith, it is the work of God, that he believes in God. I grant Man as a Rational Creature is passively capable of a Divine Faith, none else are, but Reasonable Creatures; and yet, I must tell you, nothing doth more oppose Faith than Reason doth; you must know, that this natural Capacity that is in man for Faith, doth arise from the necessary
sub-

jection of his Mind to the Creating Power of God; they who would resist his Will, cannot resist his Power, else his Power would be no Power, far from Omnipotency, if it could be resisted by a Creature; therefore he must needs have a passive Obediential Capacity or Receptivity of any higher Principle that God shall think fit to create in him, he cannot refuse, but must receive any further Light that God shall let in upon him, and set up by his Almighty Spirit as a standing Supernatural Principle to guide and direct him in all his ways: As it was in the first Creation; *Let there be light, and there was light*; so 'tis in the second Creation, God commands light to shine out of dark-

darkness, else there would be no possibility of a Sinner's Conversion; for upon the Principles he now goes, and the present Light he walks by, 'tis impossible to convert him; but by putting higher Principles, and a higher Light into him, he may be converted; this God can do, and none else, who calls things that are not, as though they were, and gives them a being; he puts a new Supernatural Light into the heart of a man, and then sets Christ before him; and by this Light, by this new Eye, or Principle of Faith, he sees that in Christ he never saw before; and willingly receives him, notwithstanding all the Objections of Flesh and Blood to the contrary.

Though

Though Faith be above Reason, yet Faith hath its Reasons and Grounds too ; but such as are not of our finding out : God shews them to us in himself, what good grounds we have for our Faith in him, from his Veracity and Truth, from his Goodness and Mercy, his Power and All-sufficiency, his Ability to save to the utmost.

Though Faith be above Reason, yet it is not against Reason ; nay, allowing the first Principles of Religion, *viz.* That there is a God of Infinite Perfection, Power, Goodness, and Wisdom, which may be discerned in some measure, even by the Light of Nature, it rationally follows, that Omnipotency can do all things ; that Infinite

finite Wisdom understands that which finite creatures cannot reach, nor see any reason for; so that though the deep things of God, spoken of in Scripture, be above our Reason, yet still there is reason sufficient, why we should believe 'em: — As for instance; That God should become man, is above Reason, but not against it: That God should assume the pure and perfect Nature of man, and give it an Existence in the Divine Person of his Son; this is a great honour to man, and in the consequence of it, doth much set forth the Glory of God, both of his Justice and Mercy. God made man at first after his own Image, to shew how near a-kin man was to God; what a likeness and agreement

greement there was between them: Now if God will veil himself, and appear in this created Image of himself, to man, that there may be a more familiar Society and Fellowship between them, this is great condescension in God, and argues much love to us, and delight in the children of men. If God will draw in the bright beams of his essential Glory, because it is too great a light, too strong and dazling for any mortal eye to look upon, that we may have free access unto him, behold his face, and live; shall this offend us? The more God lets us into himself, the nearer he takes us to himself, the more should we rejoice, that we are admitted into his Presence, and suffered

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to stand before so great a Glory, which shines out upon us here, as we are able to bear it. If there were not some distance between God and our Faith, in this state of absence, we should be quite swallowed up of his Glory; we can now bear the Conceptions of our Faith, which is as much as we can do. Though we cannot yet bear the Vision of the things themselves, we shall be more strengthened, more spiritualized in all our faculties, in our bodies and souls, when that day comes. Now we have as much of God, as is agreeable to this dispensation of Faith under which we live; we shall see more hereafter, face to face.

— Thus much for that *Query*.¹⁸

Let us now more particularly consider what there is in the
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Doctrinē of Faith, that poses natural men, that they take such offence at, is such a stumbling-block in their way, that they cannot get over: They stumble at many things in the Gospel, but more especially at the Doctrinē of Justification by Faith alone; 'tis said, *vers. 32. They stumbled at that stumbling stone*; more especially at *that*.

1. I have already told you, Faith is not attainable by our own power; we cannot persuade our selves, nor bring over our own minds to close in with Gospel-Truths; and what is not in our power, we are apt to think absolutely impossible; and shall think so, till Faith comes; Faith when it comes, makes us sensible of the Power

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er of God in working it, and keeps us ever after in an humble dependance upon God for all that he hath promised. Nothing is more unintelligible to a natural man, than this, That he who believes in Christ, shall be saved; and therefore he counts the Doctrine of Faith, foolishness, and rejects the whole Gospel; or else the Devil runs him into Presumption, persuades him *that* is Faith; a false Faith doth the Devil as much service, as down-right Infidelity; Faith in Christ is a strange Doctrine to natural men, *Acts* 17. 18, 19, 20. Therefore they take offence at it.

2. *The Justification of a sinner by Imputed Righteousness:*
 —Here they stumble again;
 they

they cannot see how the Righteousness of another, should become theirs by God's act of Imputation, supported (in the equity of it) by Christ's perfect obedience for us ; why should it seem strange, if that which Christ out of mere love intended for us, be graciously imputed to us, for our use and benefit ? Certainly the best and only Plea for Justification in the sight of God, is this, — That Christ is our perfect Righteousness. The truth is, 'tis the greatness of God's Grace that puzzles them ; they except against that, which makes most for them, if they rightly considered their own case ; for there can be no justification of a sinner any other way, according to Law, requiring personal perfect obedience, 'tis impossible ; the soul

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that

that sins must dye; but the soul that sins, may live, says the Gospel, if he believe in Christ, with a serious purpose of turning to God, and repenting of all his sins; which every true Believer doth, and must do: The *Justification* of a sinner in the sight of God, is a strange Paradox; it sounds very high, a great deal higher than the pardon of a sinner; it implies the perfect Righteousness of a sinner; imputed to him, upon full Satisfaction given to Divine Justice for all his Offences; the Righteousness of the Law calls for it; Christ first deals with the offended Justice of God, prevents the threatned Vengeance, so making way for the Grace and Mercy of God to flow down upon us: The Righteousness
upon

upon the account of which a sinner is justified, must needs be an imputed Righteousness, derived from another; for he hath it not in himself, he could not be a sinner if he had; but all have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God, therefore all who are saved, must go out of themselves to Christ for Righteousness, without which we can never be justified; we are justified from sin, not in it, much less by it: If our Justification were not grounded upon perfect Righteousness, it would look rather like a Justification of sin, than of a sinner from sin: Our great business is, to understand by what Righteousness we are justified: A sinner hath no Righteousness in himself, and we shall never be persuaded that Righteous-

teousness without Works , will be imputed to us, till God persuades us , but shall still go about to establish our own Righteousness , till Faith hath better instructed us : What is this Faith ? What is this Righteousness of Christ to me ? says a sinner : He is equally ignorant of both, till Faith comes ; then the dispute is at an end, the man is of another mind now ; he doth immediately fall in with his own Faith. What is the reason that carnal men do oppose the Gospel ? 'Tis because they don't believe it ; when they do , the case is altered ; they are of the same mind with Christ , can set to their seal , That his Word is true, and that every man is a liar , who says otherwise : When we know experimental-
ly

ly what it is to believe in Christ with all our hearts, we shall be fully satisfied in the Doctrine of Faith, how strange soever it seemed to us before.

————— Let us not go about to prove the fundamental Points of the Gospel by Principles of Human Reason: Faith fetches all from the Word; whether there be reason, or no reason for it; Faith will believe it, relying with a holy security of mind upon God's Word, let what will be against it in Reason, Nature or common experience and observation of all mankind; so did *Abraham* and *Sarah*. Faith is a great Mystery, 1 *Tim.* 3. 9. above all human wisdom, by the light of reason we cannot know Christ, till he give us an understanding, 1 *Joh.* 5. 20. Faith is much opposed by the Devil,

vil, the world, and our own hearts; but we resist all in Faith, when we continue to believe, holding fast our confidence, notwithstanding all objections to the contrary: *This is our Victory, even our Faith*; that it stands its ground still; nay, when objections come up nearer to us, get into the Conscience, to the great amazement of the soul, yet Faith, we'll acted, overcomes all Terrors of Conscience, and says triumphantly, *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* Psal. 27. 1. Rom. 8. 38, 39. Hope grounded upon Faith, is a *sure anchor of the soul*, Heb. 6. 19. Col. 1. 4, 5. Faith is all the evidence we have for our Salvation; we stand

stand by Faith, 2 Cor. 1. 24. We hold by no other tenure: 'Tis hard for Believers themselves to act Faith, because of that mixture of Unbelief that is in them, and therefore it must needs be much harder for Unbelievers to receive their first Faith; God by his Almighty Power lets it into the heart, and keeps it there: Faith is not such a comprehending knowledge as we have of those things that are subject to man's understanding; it is above that, neither do we ever attain to it, till we are persuaded of that which we cannot by reason conceive or understand, because it *passeth knowledge*, Eph. 3. 18.

Calvin shewing the difference between

Inst. 1. 3. c.

2. Sect. 14.

Reason and Faith, expresses it thus: *Persuasum habet quod non*

habet

C 4

capit;

capit ; *i. e.* the mind of a man is by Faith persuaded of the truth of that which by Reason it cannot conceive or comprehend ; and *Calvin* was no Enthusiast. The knowledge of Faith standeth rather in certainty, than in any clear, natural, logical demonstration of the thing it self. Faith is more than knowledge ; *i. e.* more sure and certain ; things that are not made evident by their causes, yet are made sure and certain by Faith, *which begets confidence*, Eph. 3. 12.

This certainty doth not always keep us from doubting, but rather supports us under it : We are flesh as well as spirit : Faith may be shaken by Temptations, but it always opposes them, and at last overcomes them : Thus it is when
the

the work of Faith *is fulfilled with power*, 2 Thes. I. II. when the Truths of the Gospel, which we hear and are enlightned in the knowledg of, are sealed by the *Spirit to our hearts*, Eph. I. 13. Faith comes by hearing; we must hear what we are to believe, before we can believe it; and besides hearing, there must be an inward conception of the meaning of those words, we take in the sense of them, and then the sealing of the Spirit follows, settling and confirming us in the belief of those Truths: We must make use of Reason to find out what is revealed in Scripture; but 'tis Faith only that assures us of the truth of that: When we are satisfied that God hath so said in Scripture, let us then yield the Obedience of Faith,

without any further disquisition or reasoning about the nature of the things themselves.

The Fundamental Principles of Christian Religion, as they are plainly laid down in the Scripture, will admit of no dispute ; they are peremptory Conclusions, proved by the express word of God, not by any Principles of Reason ; here is nothing to be denied, nothing to be distinguished upon ; we must take them as they are laid down in the Word, yielding the obedience of Faith to Divine Testimony : I grant we are to explain obscure, figurative, metaphorical Texts, according to the Analogy of Faith, and according to the letter of plainer Scriptures.

Object.

Object. There seems to be a contradiction in some Scriptures; as between *Paul* and *James*.

Ans. There may seem to be a Contradiction, but no man who professeth himself to be a Christian, can say there is; for this would overthrow the Authority of the whole Bible; we must not raise a Civil War in the Scriptures, setting one Text against another: I don't believe that *James* contradicts *Paul*, or *Paul*, *James*; there is a sense in which they do agree, though we may not presently find it out; let us not rashly cry out, a Contradiction, but consider how to reconcile these two Scriptures, to make out the truth of both; that *Abram* was
not

not justified by Works in *Paul's* sense, and *Abram* was justified by Works in *James's* sense; that was, and was not, is not *circa idem*. *Paul* speaks of one thing, and *James* of another, therefore no Contradiction; were they two to speak together, they would agree, and justify one another's words:

'Tis a safe rule, never to interpret Scripture into a contradiction to it self; while we think the Scripture contradicts it self, we shall be under a temptation to make it good, by all the Sophistry imaginable: we are not in a capacity to reconcile the Scripture to it self, while we suppose a Contradiction possible, this is to blaspheme the Word of God, contradicting; ends in blaspheming,

Acts.

Acts 13. 45. They are hard put to it to maintain their own Opinions, who can do it no otherwise, than by setting the Scripture at variance with it self, to make good their Notions; we may differ in our Interpretation, but let us not so much as suppose that the Scripture can differ from it self, but humbly wait upon God, till we can better reconcile one Text with another; we shall find, that in so doing, Gospel Truths will open themselves to our Faith more and more, we shall by degrees come to that unity of Faith, and knowledge spoken of, *Eph.* 4. 13.

Faith seems unreasonable to all men 'till it be acted, then it goes forth in its own light,
carries

carries its own Evidence along with it, 'tis persuaded of the truth of the Word, and such a present persuasion, admits of no contrary impression; if any Objections be suddenly started by the Flesh, they are as suddenly answered by the Spirit of Faith; Faith will hear nothing against its own present act, but on it goes, quenching all the fiery Darts of the Wicked that fly thick about it; the supposed strength of reason, is nothing to the real strength of Faith.

To set one or two single Texts against the general scope, and express words of the whole Gospel, is so bold an attempt, that I wonder any should appear in it.

There

There is a Justification without Works, and there is a Justification by Works; believe both to be true, without any contradiction, and let that end the difference: To set *Paul* against *James*, and *James* against *Paul*, one Preacher against another, what will this end in? We may preach up the Justification of *Abram's* Person by Faith without Works, and not contradict *James's*, who speaks of the Justification of *Abram's* Faith by his Works; — we had need be well satisfied in the truth of that Faith upon which the Justification of our persons in the sight of God depends.

You see how difficult a matter it is to submit to the judgment of Faith; Reason will be rising up

up against it, putting many Objections ; If God do not enable us to deny our selves, and to adhere to his Word, we shall be run down presently ; we are more for disputing, than believing ; whereas Faith (if the letter of the Text be plain) will admit of no dispute ; but believes the Record that God hath given of his Son, and expects that every tittle of the Word should be fulfilled accordingly : As Humane things require understanding, so Divine things require faith ; *We believe, and are sure ; Joh. 6. 69.* not we know, and are sure ; nothing settles the mind in a firm persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, but Faith, therefore Faith is absolutely necessary in all who desire to be saved. — In-
deed

deed men may eternally perish without Faith; but when Conscience is awakened, and comes to be concerned about a Future State, there is no securing our Souls into Eternity but by Faith in Christ; and this Faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God, nothing less can work it in you.

Therefore if any Gospel-truth should now strike upon your Understandings, and find no entrance, but seem dark and unintelligible, you should lift up your voice for Understanding, and beg of God that he would not suffer the sound of that Truth to pass thorough your Ears, and out of your Memories, before he hath given you some insight into it, and made you willing to receive it by faith; he

he can do it, and will do it, if we wait upon upon him for teaching; did we hear the Word under a Conviction of this, That 'tis utterly impossible to believe the Mystery of the Gospel, unless it be given to us, we should look up more earnestly to the Father of Lights for this great and rare gift of Faith.

After all that hath been said, if any should stumble at the Doctrine of Faith, and take offence at it, this doth but verify the Text. — *Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone, and rock of offence, whosoever believeth on him, shall not be ashamed.*

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